

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

APRIL 29 - MAY 3, 2019

UNCOMMON

love

SERMON SERIES

April 28 - May 26

MONDAY

1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Galatians 5:13-26

If you've ever been to a wedding, Christian or otherwise, you've likely heard the Apostle Paul's concise "love Scripture" shared during the ceremony. This week's primary Scripture is 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 as we continue exploring "uncommon love." Paul's verses capture the attributes and elusiveness of love in less than 50 words, simultaneously beautiful and convicting.

Before studying these verses, let's consider the Corinthian church's circumstances as context for Paul's first letter to them. "Corinth was the most American city in the New Testament—it was a resort city, the capital of pleasure in the Roman Empire. ... [Corinth] was devoted to two things—the pursuit of pleasure (largely passion) and of wisdom. ... [Pagan Corinth] worshiped the goddess [of] sex ... the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite ... [Corinthian believers were so concerned about the surrounding cultural emphasis that they] asked Paul if it was right to be married ... if perhaps they should give themselves to the service of God in an ascetic life [of celibate singleness]." (Ray Stedman)

The Corinthian church was as troubled as any that Paul supported, wrestling with many of the issues plaguing contemporary US Christendom. How could they be "*in the world while not of the world*," a call also developed in today's Galatians reading? Paul answers this with a four-letter word: *love*. Love, first and foremost, for God, the bountiful Source of godly love for others.

John, “*the apostle whom Jesus loved*” (John 21:20), often gets deserved credit as “the apostle of love.” But Paul was no slouch here. “[In Galatians 5, Paul] details for us what the fruit of the Spirit is. It is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. ... All of those qualities really are manifestations of the first one, love—that, after all, joy is love enjoying itself; peace is love resting; patience is love waiting; kindness is love reacting; goodness is love choosing; faithfulness is love keeping its word; gentleness is love empathizing; and self-control is love resisting temptation.” (Stedman)

Ask God for an extra measure of His love and wisdom this week as we view love, both as biblically and popularly expressed, through a 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 lens.

QUESTIONS

How might the Corinthian church have had challenges in understanding biblical love? How can the contemporary Christian church relate to some of the problems Corinthian believers faced?

PRAYERS FOR POMONA HOPE

Pray for Pomona Hope, a community-based organization founded by residents who love their city. Their work focuses on bringing hope and transformation to the people of Pomona and strengthening children, families, and neighborhoods. They are motivated by Jesus, who came to bring hope to all, especially the poor, hurting, and discouraged.

TUESDAY

1 Corinthians 13:4-6; John 21:15-17

In 1967 John Lennon wrote and sang the Beatles' anthem, "All You Need Is Love." Twenty-five years later another popular song posed a related, fundamental question, "What Is Love?" (Haddaway) Were the Beatles correct—is love all we need? And for what sort of "love" were they yearning?

The word "love" is so overused contemporarily that it's lost much of its meaning. We talk about "loving" certain foods, acquaintances, songs, clothing, locations, entertainers, etc. Love, as popularly used, ends up meaning something closer to "like a lot." In the Greek language, however, there were words for at least four distinctive types of love. *Philia* or "brotherly love" is affection characteristic of close friendship, whereas *érōs* is more base, pertaining to physical attraction and sexual desire. *Storgē* is the deep, natural affinity felt among family members. *Agápē* is selfless, unconditional love which desires others' ultimate good.

The love Jesus emphasized and often spoke about was *agápē*, fundamental to John's "God is love" (1 John 4:8) statement regarding one of God's core attributes. Paul's 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 verses characterizing love's qualities—patient, kind, etc.—wonderfully typify godly *agápē*. Sadly, hedonists often twist "God is love" into a "love is god" philosophy, making *érōs* a driving force in their pleasure-obsessed lives. Others sentimentally consider God a sort of "kindly, forgetful grandfather." They misapply "God is love" by dismissing God's holiness and justice, believing that

“a loving God couldn’t send anyone to hell.” But wouldn’t it be unloving to compel people who don’t love Him—who’ve spent their lives actively or passively opposing Him—to spend eternity with God?

Back to “All You Need Is Love.” If Lennon believed that “God is love” and knew that Jesus is God the Son, he was right: all anyone needs is Jesus Christ and His salvation. It’s more likely, however, that what the Beatles sang about was *phílía* at best. If so, at least they aimed higher than the *érōs*-centric emphasis of many songs.

What kind of love do you exhibit toward family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors and others? Does it show up in prayers, godly service and charity—love in action?

QUESTIONS

What are the four different types of love for which the Greeks had words? What are some of the common misapplications of John’s “God is love” statement? Is it “loving” of God to allow unbelievers to spend eternity apart from Him?

PRAYERS FOR POMONA HOPE

Pray for Pomona Hope’s graduating seniors, all of whom will be first-generation college students. College can often be a challenging environment for these students, especially if they don’t find helpful support networks. Pray that God would provide the support and encouragement they need for a successful college career and beyond.

WEDNESDAY

1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Romans 7:14-25; James 3:10-18

Read Paul's "love Scripture" while inserting your own name into it, replacing the word "love" and "it" with your name throughout—it's a great, convicting heart-checking method. When I do this, verse 4 begins: "Steve is patient and kind. Steve does not envy or boast ..." Yikes! When considering how frequently I fall short of this in an average day, I want to lament, as Paul did, "*Wretched man that I am*" (Romans 7:24). How do you fare when substituting your name accordingly?

Per today's Romans 7:14-25 Scripture, even the Apostle Paul would feel he regularly failed this test. James 3:10-18, penned by Jesus' half-brother, is less transparent and self-convicting. However, we know that James—even though he grew up in the same home as Jesus—likewise didn't believe in Christ until after the Lord's resurrection. Jesus' biological kin, James, like all of us, had to recognize his personal need for the Savior and surrender accordingly.

A famous old story powerfully characterizes the challenges even believers face as "recovering humans." "An old Cherokee Indian chief was teaching his grandson about life. 'A fight is going on inside me,' he told the young boy, 'a fight between two wolves. One is evil, full of anger, sorrow, regret, greed, self-pity and false pride. The other is good, full of joy, peace, love, humility, kindness and faith.'

“‘This same fight is going on inside of you, grandson ... and inside of every other person on the face of this earth.’ The grandson ponders this for a moment and then asks, ‘Grandfather, which wolf will win?’ The old man smiled and simply said, ‘The one you feed.’” (Source unknown)

The message is not an appeal for religiosity, not to “try harder in order to demonstrate goodness, thus earning heaven.” In Christian context, it’s a story of surrender. Only when we are available to God, as conduits for His love, do we stand a chance of expressing love as Paul characterized it. How do we “feed the good wolf”? With the Bread of life (John 6:35)—starting with prayer and worship of the living God in Christ, begetting loving sacrifice and service.

QUESTIONS

As the penman for 1 Corinthians 13:4-6, why would Paul have described himself as a “wretched man” (Romans 7:24)? How are your struggles similar? How can you “feed the good wolf” inside of you?

PRAYERS FOR POMONA HOPE

Pray that Pomona Hope’s Summer Enrichment Program is a time of fun, growth and education for our K-12 students. College interns doing ministry in an urban context with Pomona Hope live in community in our facility. Pray for them and the summer programs that lives would be transformed.

THURSDAY

1 John 4:7-8; Mark 12:28-31

Today we'll consider quotes on love, one even from an unbeliever. The first is a gut-punch to us who tend toward being judgmental, "type A" Christians: "I know two kinds of Christians, those that love and those that love to be right." (Jim Sterling) Remember that "[love] is not arrogant ... It does not insist on its own way" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

Secular blogger and author Dan Pearce bookends the prior quote: "The more you put your arm around those that you might naturally look down on, the more you will love. ... And the more you love ... the less need you'll ever have to find fault or be better than others." C.S. Lewis gets to the heart of an unloving inclination: "Pride is a spiritual cancer; it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."

Love frequently entails sacrifice, as the following statements reinforce. "Power, no matter how well-intentioned, tends to cause suffering. Love, being vulnerable, absorbs it." (Philip Yancey) "Love is costly. It always involves some kind of self-denial. It often demands suffering." (John Piper) "Love is not first a feeling ... Love begins with obedience toward God in which one gives to another whatever the other needs. ... It is hard to love. Often it hurts to love. Love meant going to the cross through the Garden of Gethsemane." (Jay Adams)

Apart from free will, “love” isn’t love at all, but something else. “God’s purpose for ... humans includes the *expansion* of our capacity to experience freedom and love. To achieve such a purpose requires humanity’s exposure to sin’s temptations because genuine love demands real choice, just as real choice allows for real evil.” (Hugh Ross) “Love cannot compel; it can only persuade.” (David Ray Griffin) A.W. Tozer characterizes unconditional, *agápē* love: “Love considers nothing its own but gives freely to the object of its affection.”

Finally, a convicting quote from D.R. Silva: “You don’t need a Master’s in Theology to love people.” We have no excuse for being unloving. We’re called to “keep the faith”; however, we shouldn’t only *keep* it—we need to share it lovingly with others, to give it away for God’s glory.

QUESTIONS

How are love and pride enemies? What are some of the common costs of love? What does “genuine love demands real choice” mean to you?

PRAYERS FOR POMONA HOPE

Please lift up Pomona in prayer. There are many hard-working, loving families here, but Pomona Hope also encounters those struggling with various forms of addiction, mental illness, and trafficking. Pray for protection for the students, for volunteers and staff, and for those who are struggling to find release from their situations.

FRIDAY

1 Corinthians 13:4-6; John 15:9-13; Luke 23:33-35

“What would Jesus do?” was a trendy 1990s catchphrase, many wearing related “WWJD” wristbands, etc. In reading our Bibles, however, speculation becomes unnecessary—Scripture shares what Jesus *did*. Let’s apply this to 1 Corinthians 13:4-6.

“Jesus is patient.” Showed restraint because “My hour has not yet come” (Luke 4:30; John 7:30; Matthew 22:41-47). Calmed the storm to enlighten the panicked disciples (Matthew 8:26). Delayed four days for God’s glory in raising Lazarus (John 11).

“Jesus is kind.” Emphasized loving your enemies and lending without expecting repayment (Luke 6:35). Felt compassion for the lost (Matthew 9:36), the blind (Matthew 20:34), the thousands who came to hear Him (Mark 8:2).

“Jesus does not envy or boast. Jesus is not arrogant or rude.” Laid aside His divine privileges. Became an impoverished Man and sacrificed to redeem us. Taught on the perils of envy and entitlement (Mark 7:21, 12:38-39). Taught humility (Luke 18:10-14). Washed His disciples’ feet, displaying humble servitude (John 13). Responded measuredly when Annas’ guard struck Him (John 18:22-23). Quietly allowed Pilate to discern His kingship and didn’t rebuke His false accusers (Luke 15).

“Jesus does not insist on His own way.” Submitted to the Father’s will (John 6:38), claiming no independent power of His own (John 5:19).

Yielded to the Father's silent "No" responses in Gethsemane to "let this cup pass" (Matthew 26:36-44).

"Jesus is not irritable or resentful." Stressed "turning the other cheek" (Matthew 5:38) and joyfulness at wrongful persecution (Matthew 5:11-12). Didn't resist His executioners when spit upon, struck, brutally flogged and crucified (Matthew 25:67), but prayed for their forgiveness (Luke 23:34).

"Jesus does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." Cleansed the temple twice, overturning the exploiters' tables (John 2:15, Mark 11:15). Taught that "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Rejoiced in the Father's will (Luke 10:20-24) and praised Him for Jesus' glorifying mission (John 17).

WWJD? What will **you** do? Be like Jesus, following His loving example continually. Achievable? Impossible ... on your own! But He promised to enable us when we ask faithfully (John 14:13-14)—take Him up on this and see what Jesus will do.

QUESTIONS

What does "WWJD" mean? What ways in which Jesus displayed love do you find most inspiring? Which do you find most challenging?

PRAYERS FOR POMONA HOPE

Pomona Hope's Center Street Community Garden has been a beacon of peace and hope in its neighborhood, but it will need to move within a year. Currently its staff is pursuing options for moving the garden to a nearby location, but many roadblocks exist. Pray that God would show a way forward.

Sources

- Ray Stedman's quotes are from www.raystedman.org/new-testament/1-corinthians
- Information regarding the Beatles' song, "All You Need Is Love," co-credited in 1967 to John Lennon and Paul McCartney, can be found at www.thoughtco.com/the-beatles-all-you-need-is-love-history-2523671
- Nester Alexander Haddaway's "What is Love?" was written by Dee Dee Halligan and Junior Torello (www.last.fm/music/Haddaway/_/What+Is+Love/+lyrics), issued in 1992
- The "Story of the Two Wolves" can be found at <https://mrsmindfulness.com/the-story-of-the-two-wolves/>
- Jim Stearling's, Dan Pierce's, C.S. Lewis', Philip Yancey's, John Piper's, Jay Adams', Hugh Ross's, David Ray Griffin's, A.W. Tozer's, and D.R. Silva's quotes can be found at www.goodreads.com

